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Lightning Fires Provide Opportunities for Forest Restoration

(Silver City, NM – June 8, 2006) - As summer quickly approaches, lightning season brings the potential for a large number of lightning-caused fires across the Gila National Forest. Fire managers have been able to implement a management strategy for at least a dozen fires that will result in improved forest health. Each new lightning-caused fire has the potential to be “managed” as a natural event. Each and every new start is assessed and evaluated, however, only a handful of fires may end up being managed as wildland fire use events. A variety of objectives that will result in benefits to the natural resource are identified and oftentimes include: removal of excess vegetation, watershed improvement and, in some places, stimulating plant growth and regeneration, which improves wildlife habitat conditions.

Wildland fire use events are carefully managed and closely monitored to ensure that resource objectives are being met. Fires will burn at different intensities and exhibit a range of fire behavior characteristics as they burn through fuels. When dense pockets of fuels are encountered, smoke emissions likely will increase, as seen over the last few days on the Skates Fire, 15 miles northeast of Silver City. The fire started on June 2, and has worked its way across 1,000 acres in the Skates Canyon area north of Signal Peak Lookout. Peak burning conditions have been reached during mid- afternoon, resulting in excellent consumption of dead and down material that has covered the forest floor for decades. As a safety measure, a partial area closure is in place for the area surrounding the Skates Fire. More information about the closure may be obtained by calling the phone numbers or visiting the website listed at the end of this article.

On the Reserve Ranger District, three fires are being managed for resource benefits. The Martinez Fire is the largest of the three, at 40 acres. It is located 12 miles southwest of Reserve, NM and is burning at a moderate to low intensity.

The Glenwood Ranger District is hosting two wildland fire use events. The Vigil Fire, 7 miles west of Alma, NM, was detected on June 2, and has not grown beyond 12 acres. It is exhibiting limited

fire behavior. The Brushy Fire, 3 miles northwest of Glenwood, NM, is estimated to be 50 – 60 acres and is being monitored daily. It is burning in oak brush and grass.

The Taylor Fire on the Black Range District started on May 15. The fire is south of Wall Lake and reached a size of 1780 acres last week, but limited fuels have kept it from having any significant growth over the last few days.

Forest-wide, thirty one fires have been reported since May 1, and most of those were initial attack fires that did require full suppression activities. Firefighters have been successful in their missions and all operations have been carried out safely. Firefighter and public safety remains the primary objective in all actions regarding wildland fires.

The Gila National Forest is currently in Stage I Fire and Smoking restrictions. Open campfires are limited to designated campgrounds only and smoking is prohibited, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site, or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is cleared of flammable material. The list of campgrounds where campfires are still allowed is listed within the official order 06-248, which is posted on the website at:

<http://www2.srs.fs.fed.us/r3/gila/fire/forestclosure.asp>.

For more information about the current fire activity on the Gila National Forest, contact the Information Office at 388-8245 or visit the website at www.fs.fed.us/r3/gila.

Information about all current federal and state land restrictions and closures in New Mexico and Arizona can be found by visiting the website:

http://gacc.nifc.gov/swcc/information/firerestrictions/restrictions_closures.htm

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